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Barry Salt

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BARRY SALT

Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures

It is nowadays fairly widely accepted that individual styles can be recognized for at least some film directors in the formal aspects of their films as well as in the content. However, just what constitutes these individualities of style has up to now been more a matter of loose assertion than demonstration, and indeed there have been some rather questionable suggestions on these points. This is hardly surprising since most of the ideas advanced have been suggested by people without any knowledge of how a film is actually put together, after seeing one or two projections of the films considered. Thus from time to time one reads statements such as "Fritz Lang, like Renoir, tends to film in long shot . . .," references to a director's fondness for long takes, and so on. The feeling often seems to be that many directors have sharply different styles that are easily recognized. This is an attractive idea, but when one looks into the matter more carefully it becomes doubtful that the situation is that simple. To lend some objectivity to this area, and also in emulation of the statistical analyses of features of literary and musical style that have been in progress since the thirties,¹ the preliminary work reported here has been done.

The obvious approach in searching for individual characteristics in the formal side of a director's films is to consider those variables that are most directly under the director's control; also to a certain extent those that are easiest to quantify. First, we might expect the duration of shots to vary from director to director, some preferring to shoot a script scene with fewer and longer takes than others. Hence the number of shots of different lengths in a sample of films was determined. Also, for the same films I determined the number of shots of different types in terms of closeness of the camera to the actors: i.e., whether the shots were close-ups, medium

shots, etc. (The definition of these types of shots was as follows: Big Close-Up shows head only, Close-Up shows head and shoulders, Medium Close Shot includes body from waist up, Medium Shot includes hip to head of upright actors, Medium Long Shot shows body from below the knee upwards, Long Shot shows the full height of the body, and Very Long Shot shows the actor small in the frame.)

A further classification of shots in terms of camera movement was made. In this case it is to be noted that where small pans and tilts up to several degrees were made merely to keep the actors nicely framed, which is an automatic operation by the camera operator from the early thirties onward, the shots were classified as static, as were those where the camera was rigidly fixed relatively to the actors, the background behind them moving, e.g., an actor filmed in a car. The angle of shots—whether low or high angle—and the extent of angling was not generally considered, though it could well have been.

These analyses could be extended in various directions—an obviously important quantity being the strength of cut or, more exactly, the nature of shot transition from each shot to the next, using some quantitative consideration of strength of shot transition.

Though it would not be simple, it would be possible to give a rough measure of the strength of a cut in terms of the angular change of camera position and change of closeness to the actors (or other objects) across the cut—due allowance being made for the fundamentally different cases of an action filmed with multiple cameras simultaneously, and for the action being reperformed for the second camera position after the cut. Further factors also have to be introduced for amount of movement in the frame in cuts on action, and for sound continuity across the cut.



Renoir's RULES OF THE GAME: deep focus and close-up.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

To establish the existence of an individual formal style in the work of a director, it is necessary to compare not only a sufficient number of his films with each other, but also—which is always forgotten—to compare his films with films of similar genre made by other directors at the same time. This is essential to avoid describing as characteristic of a director's work features which are in fact shared with the work of other directors. An even more absolute norm for any period is really needed as well, to give a standard of comparison that reflects the technical and other constraints on the work of filmmakers at that time and place—namely the analysis of a large number of films both good and bad chosen completely at random.

In parenthesis, it should be said that this comparative approach should be applied to the discussions of the singularities of content as well as of form in a director's work. If this were done it would eliminate a lot of the wild over-interpretation of films that continues to be produced.

The particular sample of films examined in this study for comparison with the group of early thirties Renoir films are some way from fulfilling these conditions; though chosen pretty much at random (in the sense that they were obtained by people other than the present writer for other purposes), they are all usually considered *good* films, there are no bad or mediocre films of the thirties among them. A few silent films are included to give some pointers for future research.

The statistics of interest to us can be derived from the post-production cutting continuity of

a film if this is available. (Production companies almost always have had these made in recent decades.) Alternately, the statistics can be taken directly from a print of the film, as these were. In this case it is slightly easier and faster to work with 16mm copies, and the quickest method of extracting the shot lengths is with a synchronizer, and the other quantities with a variable speed moviola, though in general any film-viewing machine can be used.

For comparative purposes the number of shots for each range of shot lengths considered has been normalized to correspond to the number there would be if the movie was 90 minutes long. The actual number can be reclaimed by multiplying by the ratio of the actual length of the film to ninety minutes. The shot lengths can be left in film feet (to the nearest half foot) for either 16mm or 35mm as the case may be, as the laborious conversion to seconds gives nothing useful at this stage. However, the average shot length is given in seconds in the table below.

In justification of the estimation by sampling of the quantities in some cases, note that for instance in *Le Million* the first 1000 ft. gives an average shot length (A.S.L.) of 5.19 ft., the next 1000 ft. an A.S.L. of 5.47 ft., and the remaining 896 ft. an A.S.L. of 5.26 ft. against an overall A.S.L. for the whole film of 5.31 ft. Here the fluctuation of the A.S.L. is only a few percent from the parts, each about 27 minutes long, to the whole, and this variation is of the same order in all the quantities we examine. So a 30 to 40 minute sample should give satisfactory results, though of course analysis of the

STATISTICAL STYLE ANALYSIS

whole film is preferable. This sort of result also suggests that differences in quantities have to be well above 10% to be significant for style considerations, and that those differences below are not; and it also shows that there is no point in pushing accuracy of measurement too far. The nearest second is quite enough for measurement of average shot length, for instance.

The distributions of types of shot are analyzed in terms of numbers of each type per 500 shots rather than for a standard 90 minutes, as the latter approach would depend on the average shot length as well, and not give directly, as we have here, the relative probability of the director choosing a particular type of shot. It might be useful to consider the relative total times spent in each type of shot during the course of the film, as also giving an indication of the director's preference for the use of that type of shot, but this possibility is declined for the moment on the assumption that the results would be much the same as those we do obtain.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Looking at the frequency distributions of shot length, a considerable similarity of overall shape is apparent. This is a surprise; a greater diversity for different film-makers was expected. The profiles of the distributions approximate in nearly all cases to that of the Poisson distribution—the distribution of randomly arrived at events or quantities observed with such things as the distance between cars on a highway. However, there are small deviations in two directions from the shapes of the Poisson distributions appropriate to the different average shot lengths: there are somewhat more short shots (of smaller length than average) in the case of *Le Million*, *Hallelujah*, *Sylvia Scarlett* and *The Public Enemy*, perhaps indicating a conscious desire to keep the shots short; and alternatively, in the case of the Renoir films and *Kameradschaft*, there are a larger number of very lengthy shots, no doubt indicating a conscious desire to keep the shots going as long as possible without departing from conventional procedures of shooting a film. The extremely anomalous case of



Milestone's *THE FRONT PAGE*

The Front Page can only reflect definite and individual ideas that Milestone had at that time about how to break a script up into shots.

Altogether, as far as shot length distributions are concerned, the differentiation of Renoir's films from the rest is not great, and there is no real differentiation of the other films one from another (with the single exception noted above), other than would be equally well provided by the average shot length taken alone. However, when we move on to look at the distribution of types of shot by camera distance it is apparent that we have a more definite differentiation of directors—Renoir's films are more like each other with respect to this quantity, which we shall call *closeness of shot*, than they are like other directors' films, and the films by the various other directors considered also differ appreciably one from the other. The exception to this are two films by Howard Hawks which are also more like each other than any other films are like them. Clair and Wellman concentrate about equally on the more distant shots (more than Renoir does), Pabst has virtually no close-ups in *Kameradschaft* and a heavy concentration on medium shots, *Sylvia Scarlett* has a strong concentration on closer shots, and so on.

As far as the silent films analyzed are concerned, the general shape of the shot length dis-

SHOT LENGTH DISTRIBUTIONS AS FOR 90-MINUTE FILM

(NUMBER OF SHOTS IN RANGE OF LENGTH INDICATED)

35mm feet	0-1	2-8	9-15	16-22	23-29	30-36	37-43	44-50	51-57	58-64	65-71	72-78	79-85	86-92	93-99	100+	
The Hired Man	18	720	150	24	12	6											
Erotikon	9	561	227	31	17												
Kameradschaft	0	116	147	63	42	42	11	11	11								
The Front Page	18	232	13	31	31	9	23	4	9	13	0	0	0	0	4		
The Big Sleep	8	240	101	49	23	21	8	3	8	8	8	0	8	3			
16mm feet	0-1½	1-3½	4-6½	7-9½	10-12½	13-15½	16-18½	19-21½	22-24½	25-27½	28-30½	31-33½	34-36½	37-39½	40-42½	43-45½	46+
Hallelujah	0	276	141	36	44	30	17	5	3					3			1
Public Enemy	9	259	119	56	22	16	10	0	0	3	0	0	1	2	0	1	
Le Million	15	314	137	68	36	18	13	4	5	2	0	1	2	3	1	3	5
La Chienne	2	78	61	42	21	27	15	8	6	7	5	4	2	3	1	3	5
Boudu	0	122	137	60	34	18	8	5	4	5	5	3	5	1	2	1	
Toni	2	79	53	39	17	17	12	3	15	3	11	4	3	0	0	3	4
Partie de Campagne	7	171	74	43	41	21	16	16	11	2	0	2	2				
Sylvia Scarlett	24	244	96	36	56	8	8	0	4	4	8	4	4				
His Girl Friday	16	158	50	37	30	18	11	7	9	7	0	5	9				4

Films (in Chronological Order)	Average Shot Length
INTOLERANCE (Griffith, 1916, 168 min.)	.7 sec.
*THOMAS GRAAL'S BEST FILM (Stiller, 1917, 62 min.)	.9 sec.
*THE HIRED MAN (Schertzinger, 1918, 65 min.)	.5 sec.
*EROTIKON (Stiller, 1921, 100 min.)	.65 sec.
NAPOLEON (Gance, 1925, 145 min. at 21 f.p.s.)	.5 sec.
BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (Eisenstein, 1925, 54 min. at 16 f.p.s.)	.4 sec.
*HALLELUJAH (Vidor, 1929, 105 min.)	.9 sec.
*THE PUBLIC ENEMY (Wellman, 1931, 85 min.)	.9 sec.
KAMERADSCHAFT (Pabst, 1931, 85 min.)	13 sec.
LE MILLION (Clair, 1931, 80 min.)	.13 sec.
A NOUS LA LIBERTE (Clair, 1931, 97 min.)	.95 sec.
*LA CHIENNE (Renoir, 1931, 94 min.)	.19 sec.
*BOUDU SAUVE DES EAUX (Renoir, 1932, 83 min.)	.15 sec.
*TONI (Renoir, 1934, 90 min.)	.19 sec.
THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY (Beaudine, 1934)	.85 sec.
LE CRIME DE M. LANGE (Renoir, 1935, 80 min.)	.21 sec.
LIVES OF A BENGAL LANCER (Hathaway, 1935)	.55 sec.
*SYLVIA SCARLETT (Cukor, 1935, 95 min.)	10 sec.
*PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE (Renoir, 1936, 45 min.)	.14 sec.
SAN FRANCISCO (Van Dyke, 1936)	.9 sec.
HOTEL DU NORD (Carné, 1938)	.17 sec.
IN OLD CHICAGO (King, 1938)	.9 sec.
*HIS GIRL FRIDAY (Hawks, 1940, 92 min.)	13 sec.
THE GRAPES OF WRATH (Ford, 1940, 129 min.)	.10 sec.
CITIZEN KANE (Welles, 1941, 119 min.)	.12 sec.
DIVE BOMBER (Curtiz, 1941)	.7 sec.
PASSAGE TO MARSEILLES (Curtiz, 1944)	.65 sec.
WILSON (King, 1944)	.12 sec.
LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN (Stahl, 1945)	.8 sec.
HANGOVER SQUARE (Brahm, 1945)	.10 sec.
THE SPANISH MAIN (Borzage, 1945, 99 min.)	.95 sec.
NIGHT AND DAY (Curtiz, 1946)	.9 sec.
*THE BIG SLEEP (Hawks, 1946, 114 min.)	.12 sec.
THE YEARLING (Brown, 1946, 130 min.)	.95 sec.
IVAN THE TERRIBLE (Eisenstein, 1946, 99 min. and 90 min.)	.75 sec. (each part)
NIGHTMARE ALLEY (Goulding, 1947)	.12 sec.
FOREVER AMBER (Preminger, 1947)	.18 sec.
OH, YOU BEAUTIFUL DOLL (Stahl, 1949)	.19 sec.
RASHOMON (Kurosawa, 1950, 88 min.)	.13 sec.
DETECTIVE STORY (Wyler, 1951)	.15 sec.
CAPTAIN HORATIO HORNBLOWER (Walsh, 1951)	.85 sec.
PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET (Fuller, 1953)	.11 sec.
YOUNG BESS (Sidney, 1953)	.12 sec.
SEVEN SAMURAI (Kurosawa, 1954, 160 min.)	.8 sec.
WRITTEN ON THE WIND (Sirk, 1957, 92 min.)	.11 sec.
WILD STRAWBERRIES (Bergman, 1958, 90 min.)	.95 sec.
FROM HELL TO TEXAS (Hathaway, 1958) (Scope)	.65 sec.
LES QUATRE CENT COUPS (Truffaut, 1959, 93 min.) (Scope)	.14 sec.
ONE, TWO, THREE (Wilder, 1960) (Scope)	.14 sec.
UN HOMME ET UNE FEMME (Lelouch, 1966, 147 min.)	.12 sec.
OEPIDUS REX (Pasolini, 1967, 110 min.)	.7 sec.
IF (Anderson, 1968, 111 min.)	.95 sec.
THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY? (Pollack, 1969, 129 min.)	.125 sec.

*Analyzed in this study.

tribution is the same as for the sound films, indicating that the distribution has no connection with the lengths of particular lines of dialogue spoken in particular shots in sound films. However, the average shot length is shorter for the silent films, a not surprising result, though that it should be as short as 5.5 seconds in 1918 for *The Hired Man* is a little unexpected. But we

are incredibly ignorant of the state of the American dramatic film around the end of the First World War, a time when the methods of Griffith were being developed and elaborated by others.

If we look at the types of shot used in these silent films, the large number of close-ups in the American film stands out against Stiller's films; it is possible that to use less close-ups has always

been a general European tendency. (See also the other films studied.) Noting also the emergence of shots with camera movement, it is apparent even from the bare figures that the characteristic American style is taking definite shape, a style that was not altogether of Griffith's creation, since he avoided using pans and tilts.

Camera movements do not seem, on the evidence available so far, to be so characteristic of a director's work as closeness of shot. There is still a certain amount of resemblance amongst Renoir's films in this respect; however, the large number of tracks in *La Chienne* must be noted, and the very small number (for Renoir) in *Boudu*. This is undoubtedly intentional, and probably relates to Renoir's statement with respect to the style of his films that he did different things in each of them—a statement that is superficially somewhat surprising.

His Girl Friday has been included in the analyses because chance presented the oppor-

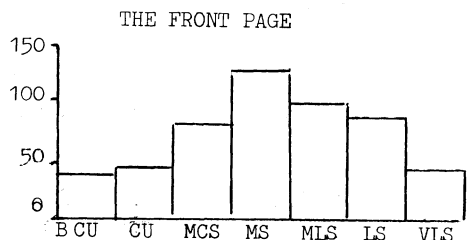
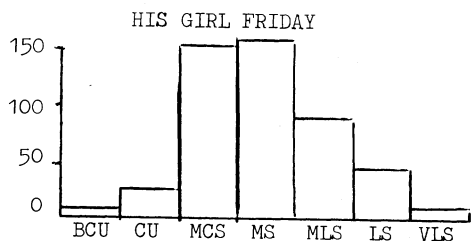
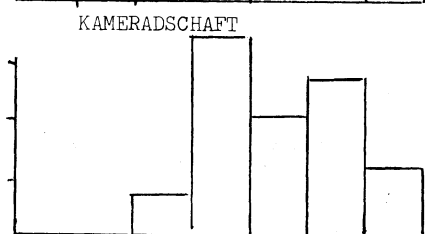
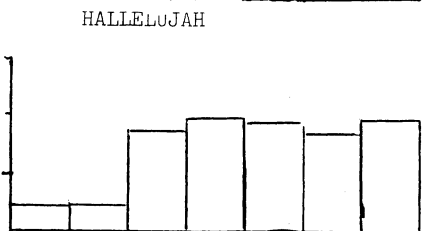
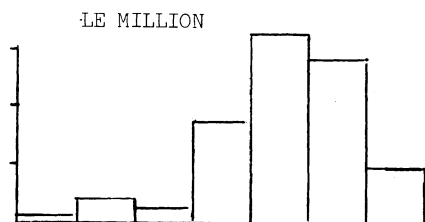
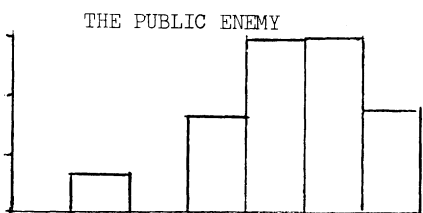
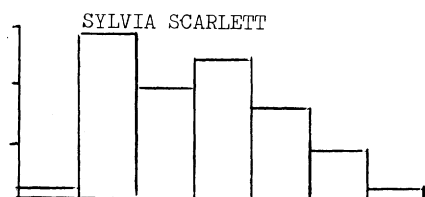
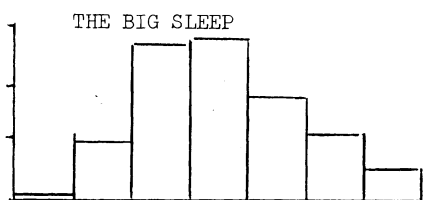
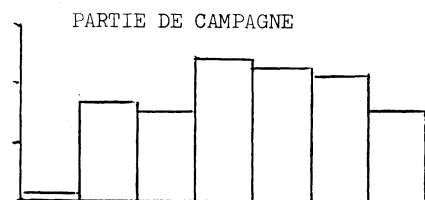
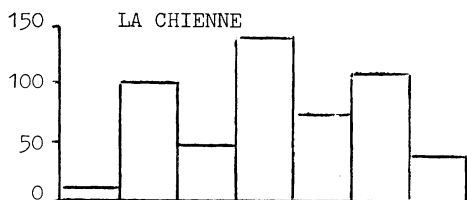
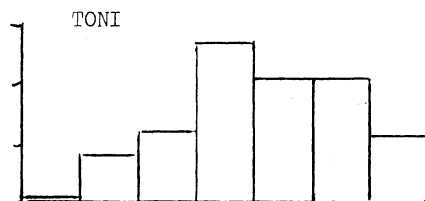
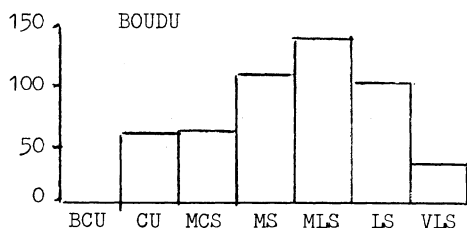
tunity of a comparison with *The Front Page*, and the possibility of checking an assertion of Andrew Sarris about the two films. He wrote of *His Girl Friday*, "Hawksian fluidity of camera movement and invisibility of editing was actually faster than in Lewis Milestone's classical montage in *The Front Page*."² Now *The Front Page* when analyzed has a far greater number of tracks of both kinds than the Hawks film; objectively it has far greater fluidity of camera movement. The average shot length of both movies is the same; however, the Milestone film achieves this by having a larger number of very short shots and a larger number of very long shots, and this latter is certainly not a classical feature by any reasonable definition of classical. *The Front Page* does have somewhat more close-ups, which might be considered more of a tendency in a classical direction, if we assume that classical means something like the style of *Sylvia Scarlett*, but this is hardly enough

NUMBER OF SHOTS PER 500 SHOTS WITH GIVEN CAMERA MOVEMENT

Film	Pan	Tilt	Pan with Tilt	Track	Track with Pan	Crane
THOMAS GRAAL'S BEST FILM	0	0	0	0	0	0
THE HIRED MAN	4	7	0	10	0	0
EROTIKON	0	0	0	0	0	0
HALLELUJAH	3	0	0	3	3	0
THE PUBLIC ENEMY	36	3	3	36	18	0
KAMERADSCHAFT	61	25	12	76	51	0
LE MILLION	16	4	2	2	0	2
LA CHIENNE	45	9	3	44	17	0
BOUDU	30	1	0	7	7	0
TONI	45	8	8	23	25	0
PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE	58	12	0	23	21	0
SYLVIA SCARLETT	22	4	0	15	11	0
HIS GIRL FRIDAY	82	0	0	20	9	0
THE BIG SLEEP	77	3	1	36	64	0
THE FRONT PAGE	0	0	6	39	65	0

(With the exception of BOUDU, LA CHIENNE and LE MILLION these quantities are estimated from 30-40 minute samples of the films.)

NUMBER OF SHOTS WITH GIVEN CLOSENESS OF SHOT PER 500 SHOTS



CLOSENESS OF SHOT (OR TYPE OF SHOT)

to override the previously mentioned aspects of *The Front Page*. In fact, from the data we have here, and from unbiased further inspection of *His Girl Friday*, noting particularly the way the sequence of violent action just after the escape of Earl Williams is shot and edited, one can see that there is only a moderate difference in the styles of the two films. The greater effect of speed in *His Girl Friday* is due solely to the extra speed of delivery of the dialogue (count the words per minute) and the addition of lots of business in the acting. Andrew Sarris is the most perceptive writer on the style of films, but the indulgence of his prejudices and his reliance on screenings only can lead him to make serious mistakes, despite his praiseworthy espousal of a comparative method. It is indeed even possible for an experienced film-maker who bases his judgments on one screening of a film to be mistaken about these matters.

There are further incidental benefits to be gained from this approach to film style analysis in the emergence of all sorts of detailed points about film construction while one is actually analyzing the film on the editing table. To give just one example, when comparing *Boudu*, *Le Million*, and *Hallelujah*, which are all pretty much static-camera films, one becomes aware that without sound *Le Million* is a rather boring film to watch, but the other two are not. The statistical results indicate partly why this is so: Renoir and Vidor in general get the camera in closer to the actors. But the points that become apparent only on the viewer are that in cross-cutting between parallel actions, Renoir cuts while the actors in each shot are still moving, rather than between points of repose, and also that in *Le Million* there are a number of unnecessary cuts—shots that could have been continued from one of the chosen camera positions are cut short, and the camera position changed for no apparent reason at all, the change being too small to add any dynamic impulse to the film.

SEQUENTIAL PATTERNS

In all these films superficial inspection of the preliminary lists of shot lengths written down

in order reveals no patterning in the way the different lengths follow one another, except for very rare appearances of pairs of shots of approximately equal length, and one or two occurrences of three successive shots of roughly the same length. That there is no overall patterning in the succession of shot lengths in the films considered is suggested, though of course it is not proven, by the conformity of the shot length distributions to the Poisson type of random distribution. Nevertheless, it would be of interest to apply Markov chain analysis not only to shot lengths, but also to some of the other shot characteristics, or parameters, particularly the previously suggested strength of shot transition. (Markov chain analysis means finding the influence on the characteristics of a shot of those of the preceding shot, and in the second-order analysis finding the influence of particular characteristics in the *two* previous shots on the next shot, and so on to higher orders.) There could be patterns in the higher orders of the succession of shot characteristics which are not visible to superficial inspection of the list of shots.

AVERAGE SHOT LENGTH

The average shot lengths that could be easily obtained for a number of films are tabulated here, and some reflections on these follow. Unfortunately, figures for some typical silent films of the twenties have not been obtained, but my subjective impression is that the average shot length in American and most European films stabilized at several seconds, but that exceptionally Gance, and following him, Eisenstein, pushed on to using even shorter shots as illustrated by the figures here. This trend had virtually no effect on other film-makers, probably at least partly because sound intervened.

Also, when looking at these results, strong doubt begins to arise about the accuracy of André Bazin's ideas about pigeonholing directors of the late thirties and the forties into two classes, those using long takes and deep-focus, and those not. In fact, the average shot length for *Citizen Kane* is about average for its period, and, on the other hand, the figure for Carné's

Hotel du Nord is similar to that for Renoir's films. Also, if anyone really cared to look, they would see that there is only a handful of deep-focus shots in any of Wyler's films, such as *Mrs. Miniver*, when Gregg Toland was not behind the camera.

A further note of caution is suggested by these figures about the too easily accepted claim that shot lengths increased with the introduction of CinemaScope and wide screen. (All American films were composed for wide screen after 1954.) This may or may not be true, but one certainly cannot be sure at this stage. Look at the figures for *Written on the Wind*, made by Douglas Sirk, who has been claimed to be a master of wide screen. Also note the near equality of average shot length for Henry Hathaway's *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *From Hell to Texas* (1958 and in Scope).

Although the values for average shot lengths collected here are not extensive enough to be entirely conclusive, they strongly support the impression that the average of the A.S.L. for Hollywood movies in the late thirties and early forties was 9-10 seconds, and there was an increase in this average of a few seconds through the latter part of the forties as more and more directors strove for longer takes. This tendency was commented on at the time,³ and culminated of course in *Rope*. The introduction of Scope and wide screen came after this development and was not its cause.

CONCLUSION

However that may be, it is also important to note that average shot lengths for the work of different directors at any period cover a continuous range, and there is no sharp distinction between directors, although there is a tendency for a director to stick to approximately the same A.S.L. This continuous distribution of films along a dimension of form also emerges in the other dimensions of film form considered here, that is in closeness of shot and in camera movement, as can be seen by looking at the bar chart presentation of the results for different films. It is speculated that the same is really true with

respect to other aspects of style in the mainstream of cinema which are more difficult to quantify, such as style of acting and dialogue, of treatment of sound (i.e., amount of background music etc.), of lighting and image composition.

The evidence presented here runs counter to the idea of "montage style" and "deep-focus style" and "wide-screen style" as pigeon-holes into which films can be neatly fitted, and it is further suggested that such terms are misleading if used as exact analytic tools.

At this stage it seems possible that a sufficient characterization of formal style for the films of a director might be obtained from their average shot length, plus the two distributions of numbers of shots according to types of shot (by camera closeness and movement). But shot length distribution should continue to be taken till it is clearer whether the non-Poisson distribution for *The Front Page* is a true anomaly or whether similar deviations occur in other films. This could well be the case for a number of films made after 1960, for instance. It might also be advisable to subdivide the classification Big Close-Up by the introduction of the category Choker Close-Up, which is already used in the film industry to describe a shot that shows part of the face only. And it might be worthwhile to collect numbers of high-angle and low-angle shots in a film; some style distinctions and developments might emerge through this quantity also. For instance, it seems that Howard Hawks used a greater number of high-angle, and even low-angle shots in the thirties than he did later; his style changed.

Thorough extension of the investigation to the films of other directors than Renoir means taking say all the films of Howard Hawks made in the late thirties and comparing them in the ways indicated with one another and with a hopefully random selection of about 20 (or more) films made in Hollywood during the same period in the same genres. And so on for such other directors as seem relevant in that period and other periods.

Several times the number of films so far analyzed need to be dealt with before definite con-

clusions about statistical style analysis can be arrived at. However, the results so far are based on more objective facts than have ever been used in the field of style comment before. The methods used can obviously be applied also to sections of a film when one is considering the interactions between, and relations of, form and content. And they can decide questions of attribution, such as who really directed *The Mortal Storm*, Borzage or Saville? A few hours with a film on a moviola is always more instructive than

watching a second screening of it, and then retreating to an armchair and letting one's imagination run riot.

NOTES

1. H. B. Lincoln (ed.), *The Computer and Music*, Cornell, 1970; Dolezel and Bailey (eds.), *Statistics and Style*, Elsevier, 1969.
2. A. Sarris, *The Primal Screen*. Simon & Schuster, 1973, p. 59.
3. *American Cinematographer*, December 1972.

DANIEL DAYAN

The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema

Semiology deals with film in two ways. On the one hand it studies the level of fiction, that is, the organization of film content. On the other hand, it studies the problem of "film language," the level of enunciation. Structuralist critics such as Barthes and the *Cahiers du Cinéma* of "Young Mr. Lincoln" have shown that the level of fiction is organized into a language of sorts, a mythical organization through which ideology is produced and expressed. Equally important, however, and far less studied, is filmic enunciation, the system that negotiates the viewer's access to the film—the system that "speaks" the fiction. This study argues that this level is itself far from ideology-free. It does not merely convey neutrally the ideology of the fictional level. As we will see, it is built so as to mask the ideological origin and nature of cinematographic statements. Fundamentally, the enunciation system analyzed below—the system of the *suture*—functions as a "tutor-code." It speaks the codes on which the fiction depends. It is the necessary intermediary between them and us. The system of the suture is to classical cinema what verbal

language is to literature. Linguistic studies stop when one reaches the level of the sentence. In the same way, the system analyzed below leads only from the shot to the cinematographic statement. Beyond the statement, the level of enunciation stops. The level of fiction begins.

Our inquiry is rooted in the theoretical work of a particular time and place, which must be specified. The political events of May 1968 transformed reflection on cinema in France. After an idealist period dominated by André Bazin, a phenomenologist period influenced by Cohen-Séat and Jean Mitry, and a structuralist period initiated by the writings of Christian Metz, several film critics and theorists adopted a perspective bringing together semiology and Marxism. This tendency is best represented by three groups, strongly influenced by the literary review *Tel Quel*: the cinematographic collective *Dziga Vertov*, headed by Jean-Pierre Gorin and Jean-Luc Godard; the review *Cinéthique*; the new and profoundly transformed *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

After a relatively short period of hesitation and polemics, *Cahiers* established a sort of common front with *Tel Quel* and *Cinéthique*. Their

Brian Henderson collaborated in writing this article from a previous text.